

**The route of the Ogilby coach road from Pontsticill
to Quakers Yard.**

K. A. Martin.

Introduction.

This paper is one of a series I have written about the area of the north of Monmouthshire and Glamorganshire and the south of Breconshire. Four of the Volumes are studies of the old roads and tracks in this area, also there is a separate volume on various archaeological features to be found over this area and a fifth is the study of what was an ancient lake site with peat deposits in which I have found pollen grains dating back to the end of the last ice age. This present paper was too long to become another chapter in Assorted Archaeology and too short to be called a volume but is, I think, long enough to stand alone.

I am conscious that I am only being concerned with one aspect of the history of Merthyr and that there have been, and still are, able local historians who know far more about the area than I. Nevertheless this essay might help to throw some light in a few dark corners and it is, at least available for public scrutiny.. It has been my experience that there are many people who are diffident about putting their own very extensive knowledge on paper.

I would be happy if anyone should care to get in touch with me on any matters arising from this or any other matters which might be of more general relevance.

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Summary.

This work started because, when I studied the Ogilby coach road from Chester to Cardiff of 1675 on the section from Brecon to Merthyr, I came to feel that the generally accepted interpretation of the road south using the known Roman road from Dowlais Top running through Gelligaer to Cardiff was wrong.

Although the Ogilby map is much older than any of the others I consulted, such as that of Bowen (1728-1760), Coltman (1788) and the reconstructed map of Professor William Rees it is the only one which shows any detail. Despite it being a strip map it does give some indication of changes of route to the left and right and of uphill and downhill. Even more important it also shows side roads, usually with a destination, stream crossings and other features and, most valuable of all, distances in miles and furlongs.

Using the distances between features I decided to reconstruct the route using the best early map – that of the first Ordnance Survey 1” to the mile published in 1832 and have been gratified to find a very close correlation.

During the course of this work a great deal of light has been thrown on other old roads in the area.

Note.

The frontispiece is an outline map of the general area which is intended to give a view upon which the various other maps I have used, which range in date from 1675 to the present day, can be seen in a broad context. This map shows the modern trunk roads, the main-road layout in 1947 and the position of various important features such as that of the main ironworks of the industrial era, the Roman fort of Penydarren, Cyfartha Castle and the railway station. In all the maps I have used common reference numbers or letters to indicate roads or features being discussed.

The findings.

It appears to have become generally accepted that the route used by Ogilby and shown in his 1675 map of the road from Chester to Cardiff (Ref. 1) ran from Brecon, over the pass at Bwlch ar y fan, through Dolygaer to Pontsticill. From here it turned east crossing the river climbing up until it joined the main Roman road running from Cardiff via Gelligaer to the south and to Brecon via Talybont on Usk to the north (Fig. 1). After joining this Roman road it was then believed to have turned south to continue on this road over Fochriw Common and eventually to Cardiff. When I wrote Volume 3 of Tracks, "Dowlais Top to Bwlch ar y fan" (Ref. 2) my attention was focussed northwards and I did not give the route southwards sufficient attention but, more recently, while carrying out research into roads and boundary features on Mynydd Fochriw, a reinterpretation of the of the route taken by Ogilby's surveyors was clearly needed.

Ogilby's map, although a strip-map, has features which enable it to be used with some precision in that distances along it are indicated with mile and furlong markers and such features as streams crossed and side roads, together with indications of their destinations. The distance markers are quite accurate as his surveyors used a hand-cart with a calibrated revolving wheel in contact with the road surface - so – if we compare the distances and features on the Ogilby map with a more recent one we should be able to follow his route with reasonable confidence.

Of course, over the many years since 1675 roads have changed and, particularly in industrial areas such as Merthyr, the landscape has altered considerably so any attempt to follow the route directly on a modern map is very difficult, if not impossible. For this reason I have used the 1832 First Edition of the 1" to the mile Ordnance Survey as a base map. These maps are of a time when the older features can still usually be found and which have sufficient modern features to enable them to be related to recent maps. Fig. 2, which covers a similar area to the frontispiece, is taken from this map and the lining and marking of features has been used consistently on the other maps shown subsequently. I have placed Fig. 2 immediately following the coach road map (Fig. 1) so that my arguments concerning the route can be followed easily and, for this end, I have added a mile and furlong scale. In addition, I have indicated the putative Ogilby route on Fig. 2 by highlighting it with green dots placed at each furlong from Pontsticill bridge. This enables a direct comparison of Fig. 2 with Fig. 1. It must also be noted that there are many small roads shown and, in places, there might be some degree of uncertainty as to which one truly represented the route. Note that not all roads mentioned in passing have been lined so as not to give a confusing image.

The route which I believe was that taken by the coach road crossed the River Taff Fechan at Pontsticill and followed a road marked as "6" on Fig. 2 as far as Llwyn-y-Milgi (approx. SO 056 089) where it divides into "6a" and "6b" with "6a" descending to the vicinity of the Roman fort ("5") – a road which is still present as Gwelod y garth. In Volume 3 of Tracks (Ref. 1) I argued that this

road rose from the Roman fort to join the high level Roman road near Garth (at approx. SO 066 100) and “Madoc’s Castle”. The other branch, “6b”, was the coach road which descended to cross the Morlais Brook at Pont Gelli-faelon. If the distance scale on Fig. 2 is used then it will be seen that the route from the river crossing at Pontsticill to here closely follows both the suggested destination and the distances indicated on the Ogilby map to within less than a furlong (i.e. 2 miles and 1 furlong). Note also a turn-off to the east for “Faire Waine” at 1 mile from crossing the Taff at Pontsticill, through Garth, and another west to “Morter Tydvil at 1 mile and 1 furlong, both of which are also matched very precisely on the Ordnance Survey map.

Continuing south from Pont Gelli faelon a second stream crossing is shown by Ogilby at a further 6 furlongs and this is also shown on the 1832 1” map. Using the 1947 1” O/S map (Fig. 3) the position of this stream can be found as approx. SO 065 077 but by this date the stream has been culverted and land-filled - it is most probably the source of Cwm Black.

On the Ogilby map a cross-roads indicating “To Markel Awain” to the east and to “Morter Tidvil” to the west is shown at 12 furlongs from crossing the Morlais brook while the 1832 1” map makes this distance as 11 furlongs. This point, which corresponds with the Mountain Hare, has been marked with “7” with the road to the east as “A” and Merthyr on the route marked “3” to the west. At the next crossroads 7 furlongs further another road to the east is marked as “K” and the Merthyr road as “2b”. The continuation of these roads can be seen in Fig. 9 with “A” joining “C” - the main Cardiff to Talybont via Dowlais Top Roman road and “K” continuing south past Bedlinog to present-day Trelewis.

The link between Pont Gelli faelon to where it would meet the route designated as “3” – past Pwllfahir – is not as clear as one would like as the area had already been seriously disturbed by the Dowlais Ironworks, there are small roads shown but this area is far from clear. Nevertheless, the very accurate correlation of the suggested route with the First Edition Ordnance Survey and, by implication, all the succeeding ones - can hardly be chance, whereas the suggested route of the Roman road from Dowlais Top past the Fochriw ridge to Gelligaer bears not the slightest resemblance to the topography.

Fig 2 also shows the Turnpike road where it has been lined in pink. This became the basis of the main road up to the arrival of the Heads of the Valleys road and the other by-pass roads and is, after some straightening and widening, still in daily use.

The Turnpike Acts of 1795 included an Act for amending and improving the road from the Neath Turnpike road , through Merthyr Tydvil in the County of Glamorgan to join the public roads near Rhyd y Blew in the County of Brecon (25 Geo. 111c. Cl. VI. [1785]). (Ref.3.)

Also, Act 156 (Public) 35 Geo. 111 (1795)

Brecs. Glam "An Act for amending and repairing the Road from the Neath Turnpike Road at or near Abernant, through Merthyr Tydvil in the County of Glamorgan, to join the public roads near Rhyd y Blew in the County of Brecon."

N.B. These are probably the same Act.

More detail is needed on the dates of each section of the construction of the Turnpike but we do have a letter by T H Payne to Sir R Colte Hoare. Sept 14, 1804. (See larger extract and further discussion on page 29 of Tracks, Volume 3. "Roads centred on Tredegar". Ref. 4)

Discussing the Bedwellty ridgeway road - "It first passes the whole length of Bedwellty Common, leaving the Sorwy Ironworks about a mile and a half to the right, to the upper end of the Brynoer Coal and Mine works, where a small stream called Nant y Bwch divided the Counties of Monmouth and Brecon. A narrow causeway of stones here crosses some boggy ground, but whether of ancient construction or not I will not pretend to determine. The green road now ascends the hill called Trefil ddu, by a tolerably early rise and cross the Turnpike Road now forming between Merthyr and Abergavenny".

So, a good date for the section from Dowlais Top to Tredegar of 1804.

Of course, the Ogilby map (1675) greatly predates the Turnpike so what did we have in the area before the first Ordnance Survey?

The early maps we have all seem to indicate that before the turnpike the main road from Merthyr to the east was essentially as shown by Bowen (Fig. 4), Coltman (Fig. 5), and still clearly delineated in the O/S surveyors drawings (Fig. 7) and the first published O/S map (Figs. 2, 8 and 9) - although the first edition map has some uncertainty in the vicinity of the Plymouth Works.

The difficulty of using these old maps can be seen if we attempt to relate them to modern maps. To help in this Fig. 3 which is taken from a 1947 1" Ordnance Survey map of the same area as Fig. 2 is useful. Not only can the turnpike roads, at this time the main roads, be clearly seen but so also can the significant roads we have been discussing to the north of the turnpike. In particular, routes "6", "6a" and "6b" were in regular use at this date and are still so at present. To the south of the turnpike things become more difficult because of the effects of industrialisation with some old roads being covered with spoil tips and others converted into railways and tramways. I have annotated some of the old roads, such as "A" and "I", still discernable with the same lettering as used in Fig. 2 and others.

For example, the Bowen map (1729 – 1760 Fig. 4) shows certain clearly marked routes. Some of these can be matched fairly well i.e. there is one (lined in orange) running alongside the river, which was probably the early pre-turnpike road, and has the label "Cardiff ..." suggesting a "main" road. Another (lined in green) rises from the lower end of Merthyr crossing "Market", probably Twyn y waun, where the Waun Fair was long held, continuing

through Carno to Milgatw and hence northwards over the Llangynidr Moors to Blaen Onnau and beyond. This route has been examined in some detail and is reported in Tracks, Volume 1 "Dowlais Top to the Usk" (Ref. 5). This green lined route would seem to correspond reasonably well with route "3" on Fig. 2 and others in this report. Its existence is confirmed in Fig. 7 which is taken from the Ordnance Survey surveyors drawings dating to 1815 – 17. As to the road lined in yellow, travelling from the north it crossed the Taff at Pontsticill and continued southwards. As it is shown crossing a stream, clearly corresponding with the Morlais, it would appear to run directly south, passing the Mountain Hare and continuing either along Merthyr Common on route "I" or descend to the river by route "F", and optionally crossing it, by the bridge at Pont yr Rhun. Route "I" is the more likely as the bridge across the river at "Pont yr Un" is shown on the map but was not that taken by the yellow road. It might be noted that Capel Gwladys is wrongly positioned - it should be to the east of Taff Bargoed and west of the Bargoed Rhymney.

In Fig. 5, which is unfortunately of poor quality, Coltman shows a road, which seems to correspond with the Ogilby coach road, arriving from the north, past Capel Glynollwm (Dol y gaer) and crossing the Taff at a point which seems to correspond with Pontsticill. From here it continues to the south passing Dowlais Ironworks with Merthyr to its west and crossing the route marked as "3", which rises from the valley passing Dowlais Ironworks to continue over the mountain to the east. This eastern route passes Blaen Rhymney and Milgatw to cross the Llangynidr Moors to the north. It is of some interest, but of unknown significance, that near Milgatw the road passed another inn called "The Mountain Hare". This route is also discussed in detail in Tracks, Volume 1. Ref. 5). The north/south route would seem to correspond well with route "2" rather than "I" on Fig. 2 and others as it clearly descends to meet the riverside road. The riverside road has a part legend of "Cardiff ..." suggesting that this was a well known road. It also shows the position of the church and the river bridge

It might be noted that neither the Bowen nor the Coltman maps show the accepted Roman road ("C") north from Gelligaer running up Cefn Fochriw. This would seem to indicate that at this time period it was not in general use.

The road down the valley parallel to the river is discussed in "History of Merthyr Tydvil" (C. Wilkinson) on pages 234 and 235. *"The roads to Cardiff and Swansea were especially bad, being little superior to mountain pathways. If Bacon (an ironmaster) wished to send a load of iron to Cardiff, a relay of mules, heavily laden, would have to climb the hill by the Mountain Hare and get into the Waun road, and thence to Llanvabon to Cardiff."* The ironmaster saw that on the question of good roads success rested so.... *"He then called together farmers and gents for a dinner and discussions and proposed that 'for their own good, and the good of the place, he would propose a subscription for making a road, to which he would contribute a large sum'. The proposal was accepted and 'it was contracted for by Robert Thomas of the Court, and was completed in the year 1767."* (Ref. 6).

Fig. 6 is taken from a map of Wales in the 14th. Century by the late Professor William Rees and it shows several points of interest in both the present and in the broader context.

1) Merthyr is shown with a road rising to the east and meeting the Roman road from Gelligaer, and the south, passing the "Fair ground". This is almost certainly Waun y pound but, north of here he does not show the high-level road running up Cefn y ystrad, past the Ogham Stone, Gwaun nant ddu, Pen rhiw calc and Talybont but, instead, he drops down to the Taff to cross it at Penybont (almost certainly the bridge at Pontsarn) before turning northwards past Dol y gaer to Brecon. He shows a road at Rhyd y Cambren re-crossing the river to take the Cefn y ystrad route. I have been unable to find Rhyd y Cambren. The area where it might have been is now under Pontsticill Reservoir but close examination of the 1832 1" Ordnance Survey map (See Fig. 2.3 in "Tracks. Volume 2. Ref. 2) shows no crossing of that name. There is a crossing a little further upstream at "Car", which was at about SO 055 133), but that too is under the present reservoir (See Fig. 2.1 in Tracks Volume 2).

The Rees map (Fig. 6.) shows a road from the direction of Llantrisant crossing the river by a bridge at Pontrhun (previously known as Pont y faen) to rise to the east following route "2" to meet, and joins the ridgeway road "1" and continue northwards to the Mountain Hare "7". Here it was met by route "3" rising from the church. North-east of the Mountain Hare the road shown rising to meet the Roman road from Cardiff via Gelligaer to Talybont at "Fair ground". This we can take as Wain Fair near Twyn y waun. The apparent direction taken on the map appeared to be quite direct and, allowing for the topography, possibly curved around the flank of the hill and reached Twyn y waun via Longtown. This probability can be seen on the 1832 1" O/S map (Fig. 2) although it was broken by this time by industrial activity associated with the Dowlais Ironworks. Such a route is also suggested by the earlier O/S Surveyors map (Fig. 7).

2) Rees's map of Wales in the IVth. Century (extract in Fig. 6) also shows a cross route from Dowlais Top to Pontsarn but has insufficient detail to define it. Such a route is possible via Garth, Pant Coed Ifor and Llwyn y milgi, passing south of Castell Morlais. As can be seen from Fig. 2 (1947 1" O/S), and in greater detail on more recent 1:25,000 maps, any such route would probably be impossible to find today as the area was cut by the Brecon – Merthyr railway, a cemetery, extensive quarrying and a golf course. The route, or routes, from the vicinity of the Roman fort ("5") to Pontsarn via Penydarren and Galan Uchaf are clearly shown in Figs. 2 and 3 and these provided a more direct route to the Dolygaer road than routes "6", "6a" and "6b" which rise to the east only to descend again to cross the river at Pontsticill. This makes it probable that route "A" from Gelligaer and "6" and it's variants back up to the high level road was primarily intended as diversions to and from the Gelligaer to Talybont route to access the fort.

It should be remembered that wherever bridges are damaged and fords unsatisfactory due to bad weather, any available alternative routes would have to be chosen. Perhaps different ones at different times.

It might be noted in the general context of old routes that Rees shows no road from Merthyr to Brecon following that taken by the first turnpike and later followed by the A470 and A470(T).

The Ordnance Survey surveyors drawings of about 1815-1817 (Fig. 7) are not as well detailed as one might wish but do show the later turnpike road running across the top of Merthyr from Neath and on towards the east, eventually to Abergavenny ("4"). This map is valuable also for showing all the ridgeway roads (and others to the east as far as the Rhymney river) from the south, including the Cefn Brithdir ridgeway ("R"), converging on the area of Twyn y waun and Dowlais top and missing on all subsequent maps, even on the first published edition of 1832. This helps to illustrate the extremely rapid development of this whole area. From here the route would have continued northwards past the Ogham Stone to Brecon via Talybont on Usk with a link, at Pontsticill, to the "Roman" road northwards from Merthyr to Brecon via Dol y gaer and Bwlch ar y fan, which was also used by the Ogilby coach road (Fig. 1). This surveyors map also shows roads descending from the Dowlais Top area into Merthyr and others rising from Merthyr to access the mountain routes to the south. It will be seen that there is good correspondence with the 1832 First Edition 1st Ordnance Survey map but that the roads are shown in a more simplified way. On Fig. 7 some of the roads have been given a letter or number in order to identify them more precisely. The letters are those used for the same roads in the area in the note "A boundary feature from the Clydach Gorge to the Taff" (Ref. 7) and, it might be noted that route "A" crossing Mynnydd Fochriw just south of Carn y Bugail also features in this paper.

It is unfortunate that Fig. 7 ends in the north at the then county boundary and that the adjacent part of the Breconshire sheet is destroyed. However it does show that route "3" did not divert through Dowlais Iron Works, as shown on the First Edition published map (Fig. 2), but probably passed through Longtown to meet the Roman road ("C") near Twyn y waun (This is identified as "3c" on Fig.7). This accords with Rees's drawing of the route (Fig 7). The map also shows the convergence of many roads at Twyn y waun and, although drawn with simplified lines, the routes can still be identified on the 1832 map and, indeed, on more recent maps in some cases.

Figs. 2, 8 and 9 are taken from the first edition Ordnance Survey. With these it is now possible clearly to see routes rising from the valley to Dowlais Top area, to the centre of Merthyr ("3" and "3b") and other branches from the Pentrebach area. It would seem that the southern branch, "2b" on Fig. 2, matches the routes taken by Bowen and Coltman and the more northerly one making good sense with the position of the Roman fort of Penygaer. If the turnpike road in this area was a "clean slate" road rather than an upgrade then the earliest east/west road might well have been this one or, most likely, "3c". The position of the fort is marked on Figs. 2, 3 and 10 as "5". It looks

likely that "3" was the most direct for east/west traffic and "3b" for that moving north/south

Examining Fig. 8 the following points are evident:

- 1) Route "F" is clear and, because it is associated with crossing the Taff, likely to have been of some importance even in pre-industrial times – it is also shown on the Rees map (Fig. 6). There are others, such as "2a" on Fig. 2 but these are more probably to have been associated with the ironworks at Pentrebach and Plymouth connecting them to the mountain roads which were of such importance before the construction of the "Bacon" road.
- 2) The other significant route is "I" seen running south along Cefn Merthyr. This route can be seen to have three major strands. One emerges at, what is today, Treharris ("P") and it seems to be significant that the 2008 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map shows the end of this road, proximate to Treharris, to be designated as a "yellow" road for some 2 km northwards. A little further north from Treharris "I" splits with one branch ("G") descending to meet the "Bacon" road at approx. SO 081 982 and this branch is also designated as a "yellow" road for some 1.5 km. northwards. This branch might also be older than the "Bacon" road as, just a little way downstream, there is an old bridge at Pont y Gwaith.

This leaves another branch off "I" ("J"), which could also be considered as a continuation of "K", which heads straight to Ystrad Mynach via Trelewis ("Q") – again this route is designated as "yellow" for about 2 km. northwards.

Looking at Fig. 8 it is also clear that this latter road ("J") is more than a branch of "I" as it crosses "I" at approx SO 083 007 and continues north and west to meet the river Taff at Troed y rhiw (SO 075 016) just below Pentrebach – ideal for mule transport from the ironworks near here.

Fig. 9 gives a good general view of the various routes discussed showing clearly:

- 1) The pre-turnpike road to the east from Merthyr i.e. route "3".
- 2) The turnpike road "4".
- 3) The Roman road along Mynydd Fochriw crossing Dowlais Top "C".
- 4) The link road, indicated as "A", from the Roman road ("C") to Merthyr. I have suggested this as an early link from the main Cardiff to Talybont Roman road on the ridgeway ("C") to the Roman fort at Penydarren ("5"). The reason for the fort being near the river rather than on high level ridgeway route is not immediately clear, as others have also noted, but

could possibly be because e.g. a) The river might have been an inter-tribal boundary, b) It was a good crossing point and c) It might have been used at times by the Romans as a means of transport. There might be other reasons.

- 5) Route "6" and "6b" past Garth is suggested as the complementary link from the fort back up to the ridgeway road ("C") which it meets at "M". As can be seen just a short distance north along this road there is the branch on to Brecon via Dolygaer descending to Pontsticill. The area around "M" is discussed in more detail in "Tracks Volume 2" (Ref.2).
- 6) The fact that the Romans had a link from the fort to the north which rose up to the high level route and then, almost immediately descended again to Pontsticill and that very many years later the Ogilby coach road used a similar route, makes one wonder whether there were particular difficulties with what might seem to be the shorter and more direct route down the valley. Certainly over much of the distance the river runs through a steep sided gorge dominated by Morlais Castle. Clearly there is still work to be done on this.

The relationship between the direct route north to Brecon via Dolygaer and Bwlch ar y fan and the route from Gelligaer, Dowlais Top and Talybont on Usk is interesting. The route via Dolygaer is shorter and more direct but would have presented problems in bad weather while the Talybont of Usk route did not go directly to Brecon but, after joining the Julia Strata near Skethrog on the Usk could have provided a direct link to the north such as Talgarth and beyond (Ref. 8).

Fig. 9 is also intended to show the area to the east of Twyn y waun to help visualise the route shown by Bowen, Coltman and Rees and the relationship of the roads labelled "D" and "E" leaving the Roman road towards the east and descending to Pontlottyn and onwards. This is described in Tracks, Volume 1 "Dowlais Top to the Usk" (Ref. 4). These connecting roads to the east, "D" and "E" and to the west, "A" and "K", shows the one-time primary importance of the Roman road "C" on travel patterns in this area.

The 1875 25" to the mile O/S map south from the Mountain Hare (route 2) can be made out over some of the distance. It can be traced south via Trebeddau then, as a tramway, past Cwm Bach to near Glynmill where the ground is very disturbed by industrial activity. It can then be made out as another tramway just above Graig Pits (east of Pentrebach Ironworks) descending via Dyffryn Iron Works to Pony y Rhun. On the modern 2008 1:25,000 O/S map the track, after crossing the Taff from the east, at Pont Rhun, can be discerned as a track or path rising from Troed y Rhiw, above Pentrebach to Glyn Mill but the rest of the route to the Mountain Hare is virtually destroyed by the A4060.

In considering the early transport links in this area it is worth paying some consideration to the canal. In "Canals of South Wales and the Borders" (C. Hadfield, P. 93. Ref.9), when the matter of extending the canal to be of more

value to Dowlais Crawshay demurred - *"However, Crawshay returned a soft answer and the Dowlais Company built a tramroad past Pen y daren to the canal at Merthyr costing about £3,000, to which the canal company contributed £1,000. It was made in June 1791".* Note the "past Pen y darren" was this built on the then parish road to Dowlais Top? It might be of interest to read this further extract of Hadfield.

Glamorganshire Canal.

"Iron ore, coal and limestone were all found near the four ironworks at the head of the Taff valley in the early days. The pressing need was for better transport for the iron they made. Anthony Bacon, using mule trains to Cardiff and Swansea, was the leader in getting the poor road from Merthyr Tydvil over the hills through Gelligaer and Caerphilly to Cardiff improved about 1767 and soon afterwards he, with John Guest and William Lewis were the main industrialists authorised as trustees under the Glamorganshire Turnpike Act of 1771 to turnpike a road down the valley from Merthyr to Tongwynlais, below Nantgarw, where it joined the Cardiff District Turnpike. The road in 1779 separated from others around Llantrisant and made a separate turnpike district, clearly because in the ironmasters opinion it had not till then had enough attention. The general Turnpike Act of 1785 brought it, as trustees, Jeremiah and Samuel Homfrey and also James Harford of Melingriffith."

Eventually, with the rapidly increasing pace of industrialisation in the late 18th Century and the early 19th. Century, came improvements of the roads i.e. those of Bacon, the turnpike, the canal and, later, the railways the old roads over the mountains fell out of commercial use.

The complex of roads crossing at "7", Mountain Hare, has made it a significant point and warranted a closer examination. I carried this out using 25" to the mile Ordnance Survey maps of different dates, from 1875 to 1922. (Note. Copies of these maps are held by Merthyr Library). To have included extracts from all these would have made this note cumbersome so here are the main highlights.

On the 1875 map route "3b" running down Cwm Black is present but only as a track of little apparent significance but it is clearly benchmarked at intervals from Pen yr heol Farm to the lower end of the stream channel.

On the 1888 map routes "A" and "K" heading to Mountain Hare are both benchmarked and the map also shows route "2b" and "I" clearly.

On both of these maps (1875 and 1888) there is a road running north from Mountain Hare which is also benchmarked but this becomes lost in the area of the industrial workings associated with the Dowlais Ironworks. It also appears that the western strand of route "3" (Fig.2) has been overlaid by the Dowlais Railway which continues south parallel to "3b".

The 1922 25" map shows "A" clearly defined and benchmarked. It passes through Penydarren Pits. Route "I" and the descending route "2b" is partially

shown as a footpath but is disturbed by industrial activity. Route "2b" seems to be the most important and is benchmarked throughout its length.

That these routes are benchmarked is good confirmation that they were of primary significance at the time of the first Ordnance Survey which preceded the publication of the First Series 1" to the mile maps in 1832

Mountain Hare itself has been a problem. The early maps suggest that there was an inn servicing what was at the time a crossroads on the major north/south and east/west routes and, indeed, the 1875 and 1888 25" O/S maps show an inn at the expected site. By the time of the 1922 edition the inn has gone but now it seems that "Mountain Hare" names the area in general. It is also of interest that Bowen in his 1729-1760 map (Fig. 4) shows a "*Cross for directions in the road*". There is a benchmark at, or near, here and, just a few yards distance, was an Ordnance Survey survey point (No. 920.4). The extensive development in this area in recent years has probably destroyed any traces of these early features.

There is another inn close by - just down hill of Mardy Street called the "Farmers Arms". What is curious is that it was locally called "The Spite". It is commonly thought that "The Spite" or "The Spiteful" inn was a name endowed on a premises that was perceived to have robbed another of its trade. A local historian may be able to comment on this.

Discussion.

The routes to the south of Cefn Merthyr also have further interest for me. Quakers Yard area particularly so because, just a short distance down the valley, is the confluence of the Cynon and the Taff at Abercynon, plus some further augmentation from the Taff Bargoed, and between here and the sea the altitude at river level is only 80m or 300ft. With the considerable water flow from the combined Cynon and Taff water transport could have been relatively easy. Indeed, the canal builders only hit problems between here and Merthyr as the Taff passed through the steep and restricting gorge a short way above Abercynon. In Volume 2 of Tracks (Ref. 7) I speculated as to why the Roman fort of Penydarren was placed at the bottom of the valley. Possibly with flash weirs and an abundance of manpower water transport, which the Romans always favoured where possible, was feasible. Certainly this would have been so as far as Quakers Yard and we have seen that there were good roads over the mountains northwards such as the known Roman road through Gelligaer or, possibly, by the route ("I") up Cefn Merthyr. It is important when considering this possibility to clear ones mind of the 18 -19th. Century canal boats carrying many tons. The vessels would most likely to have been flat-bottomed and punt-like carrying perhaps 10 tons or so such as the Romans were known to have used elsewhere in their empire. It was also normal Roman practice to use sloping weirs and flash-locks and to have man-hauled their boats. It would have been a situation more reminiscent of the Canadian voyageurs than canal barges. Those interested in the Romans use of waterways will find much useful and relevant information in "On the Trail of the Legions" by Raymond Selkirk (Ref. 10).

Why not a fort at Twyn y waun? The Griffiths brothers also had a problem with this – *"We are surprised that the Romans did not build a camp on this rather obvious site. Perhaps they had a very good reason."* Indeed perhaps the river was an inter-tribal boundary or there was some reason which we cannot imagine. But still!

The problem in understanding the picture as well as one would like is the great difference in the activity in the area between 1675 when the Ogilby coach route from Chester via Brecon to Cardiff in the south passed through and the early stirrings of industrial activity in the earliest days of the 19th. Century. It is only from the first and second decades of the 19th. Century that we have maps of high accuracy which give detailed information of more than a few routes passing through. But the coaches of the early turnpike era which we are more familiar with from Xmas cards are post 1800 and these developments had to wait for the turnpike roads to be developed sufficiently. Mountfield in his "The Coaching Age" (Ref. 11) gives a very good survey of this. For example, Herbert Williams in his "Stage coaches in Wales" (Ref. 12) quotes that in January 1804, on a very stormy day, the driver was blown off his box into the River Tarrell. This shows that, not only did the coach then travel up the Taff valley, but that it used the first turnpike road which was replaced by the present day road in about 1830 to 1835. This route was

amongst the earliest in Wales at the time and, like many of the coaching services, had to wait for the turnpike roads before they could properly function as a service. Theophilus Jones in his "A History of the County of Brecknock", (Ref.13) on pages 151 and 152 gives a list – *"At the first meeting of the County Roads Board of the County of Brecknock, held on the 22nd. January 1845, at the Shire Hall, it was resolved that "It is expedient thereforeafter to maintain and continue the following roads in the County, namely..."*. He then listed various roads including *"8 – The road from Brecon through Glyn Tarrell to the confines of the County of Glamorgan in the direction of Merthyr Tydvil."* So, it would appear that the Glyn Tarrell route was still in use in 1845.

There is, however, a bit of a problem in that Dewi Davies in his Brecknock Historian (Ref. 14) in chapter on Roads and Transport talks about the early turn system. On page 13, under the heading of the Turnpike Act of 1830 remarks – *"To those travelling between Brecon and Merthyr by way of the Story Arms and Libanus the Gyrn Hill deviation is of special interest. The modern road which winds down the valley past Ty-mawr and Libanus is the new route, being constructed about 1830. The older ran down the other side of the valley past the farm of Blaen-glyn.* This route today is the Taff Trail. This would suggest that the driver was blown off his seat certainly before 1835 and possibly 1830.

What is clear is that the Turnpike Acts of 1767 and 1787 were solely concerned with Breconshire. The 1767 Act does not come down to us but the 1787 Act has, and among the roads mentioned specifically was the Brecon to Merthyr road through Glyn Tarrell which was re-aligned via Libanus and improved in 1830. So, this would place the Brecon – Merthyr road as post 1787.

Bowen does not show this road on his 1729 – 1798 map (Fig. 4) neither does Coltman on his 1798 map (Fig. 5) so it would seem clear that the Pontsticill – Bwlch ar y fan road to Brecon used by Ogilby fell out of use quite suddenly when the turnpike opened. Rapidly the old roads on the mountain to the east of Merthyr became relict and the entire area was subjected to mineral exploitation, waste dumping and new building associated with iron manufacture. Some of the old roads were converted to railways and tramways and these can be seen clearly on the 25" to the mile Ordnance Survey map of 1875 where, for example in the area of the Mountain Hare, not only is there an inn marked but some lengths of the old roads shown in Fig. 2, 8 and 9 such as "3", just north of the inn and continuing down Twynyrodyn road, also the one which continues as "I", with "A" and "K" leading off. If the Mountain Hare had had a function of servicing the needs of travellers on the earlier coach road this must have ceased quite abruptly after to opening of the Turnpike road and the new generation of coaches.

Inns mentioned by Williams as connected with coaching in Merthyr were the Kings Arms, the Crown Inn, the Castle Inn and the Bush Inn.

I do not intend to cover much detail of the coaches or the services they provided in the early days of the 19th. Century – these matters are very well

dealt with by such as Williams, but it must be clear that there is a great difference between the regular scheduled service mail coaches of that era and any earlier roads shown by Bowen, Coltman and, indeed, Ogilby. This is why, when discussing the Ogilby route I routinely used his name. Coach roads prior to the turnpike roads were more roads capable of carrying wheeled traffic, including coaches, took different routes and had different reasons for being than those of the era of scheduled services.

This will need further research – it always does.

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- 3) "The origins and history of the Turnpike Trusts in Monmouthshire", Dr. J. Conway Davies. "Presenting Monmouthshire", Volume 11.
- 4) Tracks, Volume 3, "Roads Centred on Tredegar". K. A. Martin.
- 5) Tracks, Volume 1. "From Dowlais Top to the Usk". K.A. Martin.
- 6) "The History of Merthyr Tydvil". C. Wilkinson.
- 7) "A Boundary Feature from the Clydach Gorge to the Taff". R. Burchell and K. A. Martin. In course of preparation.
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- 14) "Brecknock Historian", Dewi Davies. Published by D.G. and A.S. Evans (Crafts and Books), 7 The Struet, Brecon, Powys.